

Huntsville Atari™ Users Group

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-From "Near" the Top-

The November meeting appeared to be enjoyed by all. 55 members signed the attendance log. A special thanks to those who brought their equipment and helped with the ST demo(s): Bill Bock, Steve Terry, Kirk Paradise, Doug Holmes, Charlie Mueller, Dean Nichols, and Levin Soule'. We may have a few 8-bit owners upgrading after seeing the ST in action.

Don't forget that December will be another "dual" meeting (Dec. 17th). The Election of officers is the main agenda. So far the following have "volunteered" to be nominated for the '88 slate of officers. Tom Brooks - President, Brian McClendon - ST Vice President, Bill Batchelor - Secretary, Levin Soule' - News Letter Editor, Jim Fly and Alan Winn - At large member of the Board of Directors, Jim Gross - Chief Librarian, Charlie Mueller - Sysop, and Lloyd Root (for whatever is open and only as a last resort). Lee Standford (1st Vice President [8-bit]) said he'd only run for re-election if he can get more than the 0% input from the members he received this year for demo suggestions. J. J. Moniz (Treasurer) would like to be replaced but we might still be able to talk him into continuing. If there's a POSITION (read: job with all the work slung out of it) still open, I'll volunteer to fill it. Now, how about the rest of you out there!!! What will you volunteer to run for? If you've got any gripes or don't like the way things are being run, jump in and help. It's your club, too.

A motion was made, seconded, and passed to increase the dues to \$15.00 per year effective Dec. 1, 1987. Your club membership entitles you to numerous benefits, including repair work on your 8-bit and ST computers. The cost to a member is PARTS ONLY. We now have a complete diagnostic kit for the ST computers (courtesy of Bob MacIntosh, whom we will repay). Where else can you get that? Also, there are now 3 Atari ST

BBS's in Huntsville, all running F.o.R.e.M. ST software (version 2.0). All offer club members an access level higher than that of regular callers. "WR8" at 837-2025, privately run by Bill Batchelor, was recently upgraded to an ST for board #3.

The ST library (HAUG portion) is being sorted and as soon as it's re-organized (by Dean Nichols on his home-made hard drive) we'll be compiling a list of the files on each disk. This list will then be printed in the newsletter, even if it takes 3 or 4 issues. The ABAX portion of the library is still at ABAX (disks numbers starting with an "A", i.e., A1, A12, etc.) behind the front counter. The ABAX disks are for any new user/owner of an ST. The HAUG disks are for members only and will be returned to ABAX when they're finished (and archived). I'll try to keep publishing lists of all new disks added to the library. Perhaps we can take "orders" for disks with the proceeds going into the treasury (and make money available for new acquisitions).

The I.E.E.E. computer fair will be held Feb. 26th and 27th (1988) at the Von Braun Civic Center. Make plans now to attend and help man our booth. Last year we had the best and most popular exhibit there. The club voted to pay entrance fees, if any, for those members who bring their equipment to the fair and/or help man the booth.

See you all Dec. 17th. Hope you had a happy Thanksgiving.

.....Lamarr Kelley,.....

.....ST Vice President.....

FROM YOUR EDITOR

I have read that Atari has raised the retail price of STs by \$100. It is believed this is because they are selling so well! The retail price should still be less than \$1000 for a color 1040ST. However, JT is having lots of management problems it seems. His efforts at vertical marketing just may be resulting in him shooting himself and Atari in the foot. Business is war, but just who is Atari at war with? Themselves? His methods are costing him potential dealers. Atari is not IBM and JT can't hope to conduct business like IBM. Jim Gross was TDY to California for a couple of weeks recently and visited some Federated Stores there and in Texas.

Seems JT has overloaded them with Atari things without first checking on just what the stores can handle and without training the sales people. They did not know the difference between a 130XE and a 2600 Game Machine. Jim said you had trouble finding regular stock for the excess Atari stock. Prices are full retail. The word direct from Atari is the new 8-bit drives will not be out until after the first of the year, and there are no 1050 drives available as the only ones on hand are those held in reserve as replacements.

Per Frank Sommers of Current Notes. "With quality control down to only five out of 25 good chips, NU (name unknown) at Atari made the decision to take out the functions that were causing the problem. So the original eight blitter functions were cut in half. The fill function and the three text formatting functions were quietly exercised, like devils incarnate, leaving you with the A-line function for graphs, screen replacements, block moves and the line drawing function. About 15% of the popular heavy sellers have problems running on the Mega ST4. Andy Nicola of Futuretronics in Cleveland, Ohio has annotated where the problem lies in 115 of 650 programs tested."

I for one wish someone would make a good autorun program for the new ROMs. That toy AUTOGEM program from MIGHTON is a disgrace to use. It really makes the ST look like a toy! It eats almost 18K of memory, interferes with operation of some other programs, and is slow, slow, slow. I am glad I looked before I bought. I also wish Atari would put the 5 1/4" PC drives on the market. If the ST 3.5" will work, as I have read, on the Atari IBM clones, then the clone drive should work on the ST. At under \$170, I would buy one tomorrow along with PC-DITTO. \$270 for a 1B drive is just too much. \$250 might be OK if it could read and write PC/MS-DOS, ST formatted 5 1/4", and all 8-bit Atari formats to include the new double-sided format. I'll bet Happy could do it if they wanted to, and for \$250 or less for such a drive, I think they would clean-up.

TOYS-R-US is advertising the new XE game machine. The December COMPUTE! had several programs for the 8-bit Atari. That issue of COMPUTE! looks like it did a year or two ago with the amount of

space devoted to Atari. Hope the turn-around is for real.

From a report in BETWEEN BYTES, the JACS newsletter. Want 4096 colors on the ST? Eidersoft has demonstrated a soon to be introduced 4096 color paint program. How about 24,389? It has been done by Trio Engineering Inc, the people who wrote Spectrum 512. If you own Computereyes you need this program. It makes the digitized Amiga pictures look pale by comparison. PC-DITTO now supports monochrome monitors. Eidersoft also has shown an expansion cartridge from Weide which includes a Motorola MC68881 math co-processor. They also have 3 1/2" and 5 1/4" drives for the ST. Supra has the FD-10, a 10 meg removable floppy drive system for \$895. The disks will go for \$20 to \$30 EACH. Note that 10 meg Bernoulli Box cartridges go for \$75 each.

ZMAGAZINE 76, October 23, 1987

ATARI OCTOBER NEWS ROUNDUP

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NEW ATARI HARDWARE NOW SHIPPING!

After what seemed like an eternity of pushed-back deadlines, last minute glitches, and excruciatingly slow boats from the far east, the long-awaited new Atari hardware is finally starting to appear on the dealers' shelves. Leading the "parade" is the SX212 1200 baud modem, featuring both a standard RS232 serial connector (for use with the ST or an 850/P:R:Conn. interface on the 8-bit Atari computers) and an 8-bit style SIO daisychain connector for use with the Atari 8-bit computers with no interface. There is only one SIO connector, however, so the SX212 will have to be the last item on the serial bus. Also, because Keith Ledbetter's new version of Express for the SX212 ("SX Express") was not finished in time to accompany the modem, Atari will be selling a separate package for 8-bit users containing SX Express, a new SX-compatible R:handler that supports 1200 baud, and an SIO cable, at a later date. Initial disappointment over this by 8-bit users was tempered somewhat when it was discovered that the R:handler from the old R:Verter modem adaptor seems to work fine with the SX212 as long as the terminal program used with it does not

contain its own R:handler (as is the case with 1030 Express and 850 Express). Programs like Amodem and HomeTerm work fine with the new modem and this handler. The SX212 retails for \$99.95 and is said to be completely Hayes-compatible. Since the SX212 must be the last item on the 8-bit SIO daisychain, it would seem to prevent the use of a printer at the same time without having to use an 850-style interface. However, the next new product from Atari will solve that problem.

The XEP-80 is a screen adaptor for the entire Atari 8-bit line that will produce a true 80-column display when used with the proper monitor (NOT on a TV set). It connects through the joystick ports and also contains a parallel printer port. All software making legal calls to the E: device for screen displays will work fine with the XEP-80. This includes programs such as Atari Basic, Basic XL/XE, and many others. Programs which set up their own custom screen displays, such as Atari Writer (and Plus), and PaperClip, will not work. However, Atari has announced that a new version of Atari Writer Plus which WILL work with the XEP-80 will be out shortly. Programs from other publishers will follow. The XEP-80 will even allow a form of hi-res monochrome graphics. Retail price is \$79.95 ("A dollar a column.").

Also shipping at present is the "new" XE Super Game System. Retailing for \$149.95, the XE SGS is Atari's newest entry into the revitalized video game market, doing battle with Nintendo and Sega (not to mention Atari's own 2600 and 7800). The XE SGS comes with 64K RAM, 24K ROM, a detachable keyboard (with a much nicer feel than the XE keyboard) and an SIO port for attaching disk drives and other peripherals. In other words, the XE SGS is a 65XE in video game clothing. All XL/XE compatible Atari 8-bit computer programs will run on the XE SGS. This includes a library of literally thousands of existing 8-bit Atari games, including hundreds of cartridges which don't require a disk drive. This gives the XE SGS a running headstart over Nintendo and Sega, which only have a handful of titles each. Add that to the fact that a number of software publishers have already committed themselves to converting their disk-based software to cartridge form, including Electronic Arts and Epyx. Also

included with the XE SGS is a light gun and three game carts, including a 256K cartridge version of Sub-Logic's Flight Simulator. The XE SGS seems to have stirred up renewed interest in the Atari 8-bit line from both software producers and retailers, as many dealers who had previously shunned Atari 8-bit hardware and software have signed on to carry the XE SGS and its software. That's good news for all Atari 8-bit users.

The final new hardware item now shipping from Atari is the "crown jewel" in the product line, the Mega. The first production units were finally shipped out recently and the blitter WAS included. Atari is now off on a "Mega rollout tour" as they seek to introduce the new machines to "professional" dealers throughout the country. Atari has also lined up a number of "professional" software publishers, such as WordPerfect, which will be debuting the ST version of WordPerfect on the tour, to accompany them. Yes, "professional" seems to be the operative word here, as the Mega will have "professional" dealers, "professional" software, and a "professional" price! The retail price for a Mega 2 is \$1699 for a mono system and \$1899 for color. The Mega 4 goes for \$2399 mono and \$2599 color. Add this to stringent Mega dealer qualifications and a STRICT no mail order policy, and it becomes evident that discounts on these prices will be very hard to come by, at least for now. This may account for the recent surge in sales of the 520ST and 1040ST, as people who were patiently waiting for the Megs to arrive got wind of the new prices and decided that "Power without the Price" was better than "Power WITH the Price". In any case, other "professional" features of the Mega include a attachable keyboard with much improved feel, an internal expansion socket, a 68000 bus extender socket (for external expansion), a battery-backed internal clock, new ROMs, an internal DMA port and power supply tap, and, of course, the long-awaited blitter chip.

ZMAGAZINE 77, October 30, 1987

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ATARI UPDATE

The following is a letter sent as a reply. Written by Neil Harris and used here as an Atari Update News Report.
September 25, 1987

CompUtah c/o A.C.E. of Salt Lake City
P.O. Box 26664 Salt Lake City, UT 84126
Dear Editor:

In the editorial of your September issue, you take exception with my statement concerning the Atari XE Game System. Since the statement was a brief one, I'd like this opportunity to give you a clearer idea of Atari's position on this system and why it should be a good thing for 8-bit computer owners.

At the time of the formation of the new Atari Corporation in the summer of 1984, the 8-bit line was not faring too well in the mass merchants. It seems that the computers were neglected during the last year or so of Atari Inc. The largest companies selling the computers, such as Sears and K-Mart, had taken the position that the 8-bit Atari computers were dead, and they proceeded to close out their inventories of computers, peripherals, and software at below-cost prices.

Compounding the situation was the set of records that were inherited by the new company. According to our books, many of the big accounts owed us millions of dollars for products shipped. According to their records, though, Atari owed them millions for product returned. When two companies have many millions of dollars in discrepancies on the books, it is very difficult to do business together. In fact, the K-Mart account was finally settled this past summer, fully three years after the new company was formed.

So we have the situation where the product lines were closed out at a loss, and the stores have the attitude that these products are old and dead. In some cases, the buyers at the stores were fired due to the losses they took at the end of the home computer era. These were not just due to Atari -- none of the mass merchants sell "home computers" any more; K-Mart does not (although a few isolated stores buy some Commodores from distributors), J.C. Penneys does not, Montgomery Wards does not, and Sears sells only business computers.

At the current time, Atari U.S. has a substantial supply of 8-bit computers in stock. Very substantial. We have every motivation to sell 8-bit computers. At times we've been accused of trying to

kill the line. Why would we want to? Because many of us came from Commodore, where we competed fiercely with Atari? Most of us had substantial respect for the Atari computers as competitors (as opposed to, say, Texas Instruments and Radio Shack). Personally, I have a fair amount of experience in Atari home computers dating back to before I joined Commodore -- check out Compute's First Book of Atari for one of the articles I wrote for them long ago.

Despite our interest in selling 8-bits, they don't sell. During the past three years we've tried advertising, without success. We've released more new 8-bit products than anyone -- DOS 2.5, the XEP80, the SX212, AtariWriter Plus, Atari Planetarium, Silent Butler, Music Painter, Star Raiders II, etc. Not to mention the 65XE and 130XE computers. We are frustrated.

Stores don't want to carry the products. We even offered to let them have the machines without paying for them until they sell! If you know anything about Jack Tramiel, this isn't something he likes to do. But stores value their shelf space, and buyers value their jobs, and we had little success.

On the other hand, there's the video game business. We fully expected video games to be a dead issue upon joining Atari. After all, everyone knew the video game business was dead. At Commodore, we thought we'd killed it! But, we were surprised when the existing inventory of about a million 2600 systems sold during the first year of the new Atari Corporation, without any advertising and with little effort. As a kind of experiment, we built another million machines and sold them during the next year. "Aha," we said to ourselves. "Doesn't look like a dead business to us!"

So we went forward with the 7800 system, for which parts were already available, and lo! and behold, we sold all we could make of them last year also.

Now Nintendo and Sega have jumped in with high-end, \$150 game systems. Nintendo in particular is doing very well indeed. They don't sell as many of these as we sell, but they sell for more money. So Atari took a hard look at the marketplace and determined that we should do a \$150 system as well.

Examining the products, it seems that Nintendo has decent graphics, a light gun, not much of a joystick... and a robot. What does the robot do? Well, it photographs very well in their commercials, but really it doesn't do anything to help in playing games.

For the same \$150, we can provide the consumer with a game system, light gun, three pieces of software -- and a computer-style keyboard. While not as dramatic looking, I'm sure all computer users know that some games just can't be played with a joystick alone. Flight Simulator II, which comes with our XE Game System, needs the keyboard. So do adventure games and most other strategy games.

We can't get stores to carry the 8-bit computers. They won't even sell the software to their existing customers -- for a while software companies had to put the 8-bit programs on the back of the C64 disk to get shelf space at all! But when we showed the XE Game System to the buyers, they were totally enthusiastic.

This is truly marketing in action.

We have something like 50 cartridges in inventory from the old days, and are feverishly working on converting disk games to cartridge. With some clever programming, we can now get 256K of ROM on a cartridge, instead of the 16K in the old games. That's how we got Flight Simulator II *plus* a scenery disk onto a single cartridge. There is nothing different about the XE Game System to make this work -- existing 8-bit computer owners can use the very same cartridges.

So what does this mean to you? In the beginning, all it will mean is that more games will be coming in 8-bit Atari format. But, what we hope is that this will be the springboard to revitalizing the 8-bit Atari computer line. Once the XE Game Systems start selling (and they have just begin arriving in stores this past week), we have a potential market of hundreds of thousands of consumers. At this time Commodore is selling around 300,000 C64's annually. With a market this size, the motivation for software developers to bring out new titles in our format is enormous.

Remember, the XE Game System is totally compatible with your 8-bit computers. Once the customer takes the XE Game System home, they discover in the manual that the system includes the Atari

BASIC language and that there is an SIO port for computer peripherals. We expect that people who may have been frightened of computers, or leery of spending the money on a computer with a drive (\$400+) initially, may very well upgrade to a fuller system. And we hope that they will then demand the kind of software that we need to see developed -- serious applications software.

While this is happening, we continue to sell the 8-bit computers. Contrary to some published reports, we cannot simply remove the motherboard from the 65XE's and put them in the Game Systems. It's a different board. So, we still have the large inventory of computers. And we expect that smart Atari dealers will use the advertising campaign for XE Game Systems and sell the computers as a compatible alternative. "Why," they might ask a customer, "should you spend \$150 when you can buy the system ala carte, with a computer for \$99 in a more compact case and then buy whatever software you want?"

Lets all hope this works. Atari has tried just about everything in our power to keep the 8-bit computer line going. This is probably our best shot.

One last fact -- for our customers in areas where there are Federated stores, Jack Tramiel has said that these stores will carry a full line of Atari 8-bit computers. So availability should be a whole lot better in California, Texas, Arizona, and Kansas.

Thanks for giving me the time to explain in much more detail than I can online. We've been through some tough times together. Please try to keep the faith and bear with us just a little longer while we get the 8-bit situation straightened out.

Best regards,
Neil Harris

ZMAGAZINE 78, November 6, 1987
OVERVIEW OF COMDEX 1987 ATARI BOOTH
(Las Vegas, NV -- Comdex Fall 87) In a series of major product introductions, Atari Corp emerges as a maker of a complete line of high-performance, low-cost solutions for the business world.

New technology is showcased by Abaq, an ultra-high-performance workstation with blazing speed and dazzling graphics. The Abaq, based on a sophisticated

"transputer" chip, runs more than 10 times faster than a PC/AT technology and more than 5 times faster than the 68020 with math processor. The parallel processing capability of Abaq lets a single system multiply its processing power by adding extra transputer chips.

Atari unveiled its new CD player capable of reading CD-ROM disks and of playing musical CD disks. The CD-ROM is supported by a Mega and ST-compatible DMA interface, and will retail in early 1988 for under \$600.

Atari's connectivity answer is a LAN which is compatible with the NETBIOS standard used by IBM and Novell. It communicates data at 1 megabits-per-second to PC's and over 250K bits-per-second over Appletalk. Atari is planning to manufacture "PromiseLAN" adapters for the Mega, ST, and PC computer lines.

The Atari Mega computers are showcased with a variety of solid business solutions. Desktop publishing is represented by both the Atari SLM804 Laser Printer and by G.O. Graphics, who are porting their Deskset program (CompuGraphics compatible) which Atari will market. Word Perfect is displaying the recently shipped Word Perfect ST and Atari is displaying Microsoft Write. A group of vendors are appealing to VARs with vertical packages running under the IDRIS multi-user multi-tasking operating system. Several new high-end CAD packages are on display including Foresight's Drafix 1.

Atari expanded its PC-compatible offerings by adding two new models, the PC2 (PC XT compatible) and PC4 (PC AT compatible), both with EGA graphics, high clock speeds, and low price tags. A variation of the PC3 will operate in VGA graphics mode as well. The PC2 and PC4 will be offered with 3.5" or 5.25" floppy disks and with hard disks. These new models join the PC1, which at \$799 is a basic 512K PC XT compatible, suitable for use as a LAN workstation and for stand alone personal computing. The PC2 includes XT-compatible slots, while the PC4's slots are PC AT compatible.

"We offer complete systems for the office," said Atari president Sam Tramiel. "I can see Atari Mega computers with laser printers as desktop publishing stations exchanging data with a satellite group of PC1's as LAN stations. An entire office environment can be created

The PC, the Macintosh, and the Atari computers co-exist. Each can do the things they do best."

VERSION 2.0 - LDW BASIC

By Levin Soule'

Move over GFA Basic, the NEW stand alone LDW BASIC is here! For \$90 it looks like it will do everything GFA Basic, GFA Companion and GFA Compiler put together can do for \$210. For an additional \$50, (total outlay \$260 retail) GFA Vector will let GFA Basic do real time animations. This is something LDW does not claim to do at this time. On the other hand, you can program LDW Basic with or without line numbers and with one or multiple commands per line, up to 255 characters per line with the proper editor. No one command limit per line as in GFA. And a review of GFA Companion in the October ST Informer did not speak kindly of GFA Companion.

LDW comes with MicroEmacs as an editor, but 80 characters per line in this version seems to be the usable limit without additional instructions, which are not included. MicroEmacs 3.8i will give the full 255 characters per line. I use MicroEmacs 3.8i. It lets you use the mouse to move the cursor. Other than all the commands being different, 3.8i works much the same as STwriter, but with the option of having a scrolling screen. The version supplied must be an old one as it still refers to MS-DOS in the command file listing. The point is that you can substitute any editor you want, even Atari Basic (old or new) as the editor. 1st Word gives 160 characters per line. The syntax of LDW Basic is such that many (no carry over of peeks or pokes) program listings written for GW Basic, PC Basic (IBM), Applesoft Basic, Atari 8-bit Basic, C-64/128 Basic, or Microsoft Basic can run with only a few, if any, changes. The book says that Macintosh basic programs that have a lot of calls to the Mac Toolbox (their GEM) convert to LDW/ST basic GEM programs with ease. So there is a large source of programming already available. GFA source files may take to many changes to convert to a Microsoft Basic form, so it could be hard to make GFA work with LDW. However, one of the example programs, without line numbers, looks a lot like a GFA source file.

You can use desk accessories while running your compiled basic program. You

can program all the GEM functions in your basic program, using the new one or two word commands. There are a few commands I have never seen in any basic before. Several benchmarks show it to be faster then GFA COMPILED Basic, while a some show it to be slower. Benchmark performance depends on how the benchmark was written and what the person wants his benchmark to prove! Benchmarks show it ranges from almost as fast to much faster then 'C'. In addition to the standard DIM statement, it has DIM STATIC which fixes the size of the array at compile time. Static arrays are processed much faster then the dynamic arrays. This cut my sort time almost in half! Integers can be either two or four bytes long, so the range can be either 64K (normal in other basics) or 4MEG (normal in LDW). This same range applies to MKI\$, CVI, CINT, etc. The revised instruction book is an added chapter to the original version 1.1 book, with 130 pages of simple new commands for accessing GEM, VID, and AES. The total addition looks like it will do most of what 'C' can do and is MUCH easier to learn to program with. It could provide an easier way to learn 'C' programing. It's calls to assembly let it do anything the ST can do. Even grade school kids will be able to use it, as the command structure they learned on their computers at school will work with LDW Basic on the ST with few changes. I saw some serious Applesoft basic programs done by 11 to 13 year olds on Computer Chronicles a couple of months ago. The ST now has THREE basics that are almost as fast or in some things faster then 'C'. Who knows, but these new basics now coming out for many machines may well put one big dent in the use of 'C'.

A mid October issue of COMPUTERWORLD has an article that says "Basic will not only serve as the batch language for Microsoft Corp's OS/2 and Presentation Manager but will also evolve into a general purpose macro language that will compete against others such as that in Lotus Development Corp's 1-2-3, according to Microsoft officials. The firm used the kickoff of Quickbasic 4.0, a language product, to explain its far-reaching Basic strategy intended to expand the popular language's life into the next generation of MS OS/2 and the Presentation Manager." The November BYTE

says "QuickBASIC 4.0, the latest version of Microsoft's MS-DOS BASIC compiler, finally delivers on the promise of its name. Using an incremental precompiler (ED HAUG - as in DTACK basic for the ST) and a threaded p-code interpreter. QuickBASIC 4.0 gives BASIC programers the fast feedback of a BASIC interpreter without sacrificing execution in finished programs." Now who said that BASIC was useless for serious programing?

With the ST now in the county schools, just think what this could do for the local sales of Atari in a couple of years! Most kids (parents) buy the same type of computer they were introduced to in school, and with the power and price of an ST and an easy to learn basic!

NFL QUIZ

Disseminated by Jim Dysle

The ACCESS KEY

Can you match the correct names of the NFL teams with the following list of clues?

- 1 Trained to hunt and kill
- 2 Roman Catholic religious leaders.
- 3 Kings of the Beasts.
- 4 Credit card users
- 5 Shoplifters.
- 6 Midnight Snackers.
- 7 One dollar for corn.
- 8 Streakers.
- 9 Peter, Paul and Mary.
- 10 Opposite of "U"s.
- 11 Six shooters.
- 12 Wise sunbathers
- 13 Unwise sunbathers
- 14 Soldier insects.
- 15 7^2.
- 16 Equine rodeo participants.
- 17 Patrick Henry.
- 18 747's.
- 19 Used to be girls.
- 20 Six rulers.
- 21 Tribal leaders
- 22 Half bovine/half man.
- 23 Lubricators.
- 24 Barbie with fish arms
- 25 Loaders
- 26 Protected species
- 27 Master Charge correspondence
- 28 Marine birds

Answers in the January 88 newsletter I'll print almost anything to get you to rejoin. ED HAUG

